

08/03/21 Tuesday

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US CDC Renews Federal Ban on Evictions Until October 3, Defying Supreme Court Ruling by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has announced it is renewing the ban on evictions that expired on July 31, setting the stage for a constitutional showdown after the US Supreme Court ruled earlier this year that the public health agency didn't have the authority to issue such a ban.

After days of protests outside the US Capitol and appeals by federal lawmakers, US President Joe Biden has bowed to popular pressure and directed the CDC to extend the federal eviction moratorium until October 3. The move will protect perhaps 90% of American renters as [more than 11 million people](#) remain behind on their rent payments, [according to CNBC](#).

"Following the recent surge in cases brought forth by the highly transmissible Delta variant, the CDC Director now issues a new order temporarily halting evictions for persons in counties experiencing substantial or high rates of transmission," [the updated order](#) issued Tuesday states. "This order will expire on October 3, 2021, but is subject to further extension, modification, or rescission based on public health circumstances."

However, the new measure is more restrictive than before, now saying it is "intended to target specific areas of the country where cases are rapidly increasing, which likely would be exacerbated by mass evictions."

The updated terms defined a "covered person" as someone who:

- has used best efforts to obtain all available governmental assistance for rent or housing
- has earned no more than \$99,000, or \$198,000 if filing jointly in 2020 and expects to earn less than that in 2021
- is unable to pay the full rent or make a full housing payment due to substantial loss of household income, loss of compensable hours of work or wages, a layoff, or extraordinary out-of-pocket medical expenses
- would likely be rendered homeless by eviction
- resides in a US county experiencing "substantial" or "high" rates of community transmission levels of SARS-CoV-2 as defined by the CDC

"I applaud the CDC for imposing an eviction moratorium for the vast majority of the population," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) said in a statement. "For anyone to lose their home through no fault of their own is devastating, and it's shameful that Republicans in Congress aren't lifting a finger to help prevent it from happening."

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) said in a statement that "Democrats have worked tirelessly for this action, which is based on public health needs. This brand new moratorium will provide time for the money allocated by Congress to flow, as it helps stop the spread of the virus which is worsening due to the delta variant and protects families and landlords. I am especially

pleased about what this means to the children who have had uncertainty about their housing, their health and their education."

The decision sets the stage for a showdown with the US Supreme Court over the legality of the move. In late June, the nation's [top court sided](#) with a group of Alabama landlords, agreeing the CDC "exceeded its existing statutory authority" with the eviction ban; however, the court declined to strike down the ban itself, since it only had one month left before it expired. However, Justice Brett Kavanaugh noted a ban on evictions wasn't necessarily illegal if implemented via other means, such as legislative action.

As a consequence, as the end of July neared, confusion reined in Washington about what to do: Congressional Democrats [appealed to Biden](#) to renew the ban, while [Biden appealed](#) to the CDC to take action, then to Congress just hours before the House adjourned on Friday for a seven-week recess.

As lawmakers left and the ban expired, Rep. [Cori Bush \(D-MO\) began](#) a protest on the steps of the US Capitol building, promising to continue sleeping rough until a new eviction ban was implemented. The protest drew at times hundreds of protesters and several other progressive lawmakers who came to express their support.

On Monday, Biden again appealed to the CDC, which again declined, saying it had "been unable to find legal authority," according to White House Press [Secretary Jen Psaki](#).

Expiration of the ban would have opened more than 11 million Americans up to being evicted from their homes, since many state eviction bans put in place during the COVID-19 pandemic had either already expired or would soon expire. While the administration has earmarked some \$46 billion in emergency financial assistance for renters behind on their rent, more than enough to erase all rent debts accumulated during the pandemic, only a tiny fraction of that money has actually been distributed - just \$4.5 billion.

In its updated order Tuesday, the CDC referenced the slow pace of aid disbursement as a contributing factor in their decision.

"Based on analysis of grantee reporting, [the Department of the] Treasury believes that the monthly deployment of rental assistance by state and local emergency rental assistance programs will continue to increase from the significant deployment in June," the order notes. "In addition to Emergency Rental Assistance, there are also coordinated efforts across federal agencies to - in partnership with states and localities - promote eviction prevention strategies." Unlike renters, homeowners were given the option of actually pausing their mortgage payments, although a federal moratorium on foreclosures of federally-backed mortgages was [also allowed to expire](#) on July 31. With 1.75 million Americans behind on their house payments, and 1.5 million of them more than 90 days behind, the threat of mass foreclosures has become palpable even with protection for renters.

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UK Maritime Agency Reports 'Potential Hijack' of Bitumen Tanker 'Asphalt Princess' in Arabian Sea
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

UK Maritime Trade Operations reported the "potential hijack" on Tuesday of an oil tanker in the Arabian Sea near the Emirati port of Fujairah.

According to Reuters, two maritime security sources told the outlet that "Iranian-backed forces" are suspected of the attack. Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson [Saeed Khatibzadeh has called](#) the incident "suspicious" and urged against creating a "false atmosphere" against Tehran. "Iran's naval forces are ready for help and rescue in the region," Khatibzadeh added.

Also citing a security source, [Sky News reported](#) that eight or nine individuals were believed to be on board the ship, which is named Asphalt Princess, as part of what the source called an "unauthorized boarding." [Lloyd's List](#) also reported, citing "sources directly involved in the incident," that the ship had been ordered to sail toward Iran.

The ship, which flies under a Panamanian flag and weighs in at a rather small 9,748 tons, is used for transporting bitumen and asphalt products, which are made as part of the same process that creates hydrocarbon fuels like octane and butane out of crude oil. It was built in 1976.

According to the website [Marine Traffic](#), Asphalt Princess was sailing from Khor Fakkan, United Arab Emirates, to Sohar, Oman, a port just 65 miles to the south. However, its last reported location was in the center of the Gulf of Oman, about 70 miles east of Khor Fakkan, 65 miles north of Sohar, and 45 miles south of the Iranian city of Bandar-e-Jask.

The US State Department said in a comment Tuesday it was concerned about reports of a maritime incident in the Gulf of Oman and was looking into it and coordinating with partners, but noted it was still too early to offer judgement on the incident.

Concurrent to the crisis on the Asphalt Princess is another situation in the Gulf of Oman involving four ships - the Singapore-flagged tanker Golden Brilliant, Guyana flagged tanker Queen Ematha, India-flagged tanker Jag Pooja and the Vietnam-flagged tanker Abyss - all of which [were reported Tuesday](#) as being "not under command" due to loss of steering ability. The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) is monitoring the situation and has reported it as a "non-piracy incident."

Last week, another incident occurred in the same waters, which Western powers have also accused Tehran of being behind. On Friday, the Liberian-flagged oil tanker Mercer Street was struck by a drone in the Gulf of Oman, [killing a British](#) and a Romanian citizen. The Japanese-owned ship is operated by Zodiac Maritime, which is part of the Zodiac Group owned by Israeli billionaire Eyal Ofer, leading to claims by Tel Aviv that the attack was [one against Israel](#).

[Israeli media reported](#) on Saturday that the government of Prime Minister Naftali Bennett had shared intelligence information with the US and UK showing Iran was behind the attack, but none of that information has been made public or shared with other nations. [Khatibzadeh called](#) the accusations "contradictory, false and provocative," and vowed Iran would respond "immediately and strongly" to any attack ostensibly made in response, whether it is the ["collective" response](#) US Secretary of State Antony Blinken promised or the [lone wolf response](#) Bennett said Israel was also considering.

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Not Just Renters: Mortgage Foreclosure Protections Expiring Too, Endangering 1.75 Million Homeowners
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

US COVID-19 cases are once again spiking, reaching levels not seen since the winter, but so far neither state nor federal government officials are considering social lockdowns like those used before mass vaccination began. Instead, they are emphasizing mask-wearing and getting the vaccine, which can mitigate severe cases.

The federal ban on evictions of renters wasn't the only pandemic-related protection allowed to expire on July 31: a federal ban on foreclosures also ended, and while several ad hoc programs will mitigate the effect for a few months, nearly 2 million Americans remain behind on their house payments.

Just days after a global pandemic was declared in March 2020, the Trump administration began offering homeowners the option of forbearance on their federally-backed mortgage payments, allowing them to reduce or defer those payments without penalty as a way to weather the financial hardships created by covid-related shutdowns and job losses.

The program affected homes with mortgage backed by the Federal Housing Administration (FHA), Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Department of Agriculture (USDA), and state corporations Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac under the Federal Housing Finance Agency (FHFA), and at its height protected [more than 11 million families](#).

However, the Biden administration said in June that its month-long refresh of the program would be its last, and as August begins, at least 1.75 million homeowners remain in forbearance, or 3.5% of all homes in the US, according to the [Mortgage Bankers Association](#). The Consumer Finance Protection Bureau (CFPB) has created [three new safeguards](#) that will help mitigate or delay foreclosures for a time, but they are confined to borrowers who fell behind during the pandemic and ultimately won't halt foreclosure altogether.

Those measures, which protect borrowers more than 120 days behind on their payments, include a loss mitigation program that can delay foreclosure; requiring loan servicers to verify that a property is considered abandoned under local and state laws before proceeding with a foreclosure; and requiring loan servicers to make a "reasonable" effort to contact borrowers and to wait 90 days after doing so before beginning the foreclosure process.

However, those protections don't go into effect until August 31, meaning some could still be kicked out of their homes in the month-long gap.

About 1.5 million of the 1.75 million in forbearance are at least 90 days behind - a number roughly equivalent to that reported in March 2021 - and at least 20% of them won't be able to forestall foreclosure past September, according to [the Washington Post](#).

"This is just more of the K-shaped recovery," Diane Thompson, senior adviser to acting CFPB director Dave Uejio, told the Post. "The ones who are left [in forbearance] are by and large people who aren't paying, can't pay and haven't made payments for a very long time."

The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) signed into law in April 2021 provided \$10 billion in a Homeowners Assistance Fund to help homeowners pay off that debt, but "the program is moving so slowly that protections are expiring before states have figured out how to distribute the money," the Post reported. According to the paper, by Saturday, the US Treasury hadn't even opened its portal for states to submit their distribution plans, meaning they can only access some 10% of what's been set aside.

Budding Movement Demands Return of Eviction Ban

A similar situation has plagued the Emergency Rental Assistance Program, created by the CARES Act in December 2020 to distribute \$25 billion in bailouts to renters behind on their payments. Between the December allotment and a subsequent \$21.5 billion created for state and local programs in early 2021, some \$46 billion was set aside to save [more than 15 million](#) American renters from eviction.

However, as [Sputnik has reported](#), the federal eviction moratorium mandated by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) was also allowed to expire at the end of July without being replaced by a more concrete action, such as a federal law or executive order, and just a tiny fraction of the aid money - \$3 billion in federal funds and \$1.5 billion in state and local funds - has actually been paid out to struggling renters.

Unlike homeowners, renters never got [an equivalent pause](#) on their rent payments, which have piled up into substantial debts over the past 18 months.

The result is that millions of Americans behind on rent payments face the immediate or impending threat of being rendered homeless, as some state eviction bans are also set to expire in the coming weeks.

With House lawmakers beginning a seven-week summer recess on Friday without replacing the eviction ban and the Senate set to join them later this week, activists have rallied to the call by Rep. Cori Bush (D-MO), a progressive freshman representative, to occupy the steps of the US Capitol building until a new protection is enacted.

On Tuesday afternoon, the CDC suddenly reversed course and issued a [new "targeted" moratorium](#) lasting until October 3, noting the order is confined to target areas with significant community spread of COVID-19, which heightens the risks associated with eviction and homelessness.

Unemployment, Student Loan Help Ending

Other pandemic protections are also being allowed to sunset, as well. Many US states have [already voluntarily ended](#) their federal unemployment benefit programs even as millions remain without jobs and new unemployment applications are once again rising. The federal program created by the ARPA was given sufficient funding to operate until September 6, but more than half of state governments had already cut theirs by early July, driven by conservative beliefs that the payments have been keeping Americans from more adamantly seeking out employment. Student loan deferment, also introduced at the start of the pandemic by the US Department of Education, allowed millions of Americans to preserve their meager incomes during lockdown periods by putting off payment of loans used to pay for their college education. The program is [set to expire](#) on September 30, 2021, but Biden hasn't yet spoken on the issue. Americans hold roughly \$1.7 trillion student loan debt.

Several lawmakers have pushed the Biden administration to extend it until March 2022, and to forgive up to \$50,000 per person in student loan debt. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer

(D-NY), Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) and Rep. Ayanna Pressley (D-MA) [appealed to Biden](#) last week to make the move via executive action, urging that “failure to act would be unconscionable, would undermine our economic recovery.”

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US Navy Holds World-Spanning ‘Large Scale Exercise,’ Biggest War Games in Decades
by [Morgan Artyukhina](#)

The US Navy has begun its largest war games in decades in the globe-spanning Large-Scale Exercise, running for the next two weeks and involving multiple US fleets, in a return to the massive Cold War-era drills intended to showcase the Pentagon’s ability to fight a war on multiple fronts.

According to [a news release](#) by US Fleet Forces Command on Tuesday, the massive drills are “based on a progression of fleet battle problems and scenarios” intended to “refine how we synchronize maritime operations across multiple fleets in support of the joint force.”

“We have shifted focus from the individual Carrier Strike Group to a larger fleet-centric approach, challenging fleet commanders’ abilities to make decisions at a speed and accuracy that outpaces the adversaries,” Adm. Christopher W. Grady, commander, US Fleet Forces Command, said in the release. “LSE is more than just training; it is leveraging the integrated fighting power of multiple naval forces to share sensors, weapons, and platforms across all domains in contested environments, globally.”

The drills will last until August 16 and take place across 17 different time zones, according to the Navy, ranging from the Black Sea and Mediterranean Sea to the South China and East China Seas. The regions are perhaps the most likely to see protracted naval operations in the event of a future conflict with Russia or China, which the US has identified as its “near-peer” competitors and shifted its global strategy toward outpacing and containing.

James R. Holmes, the J.C. Wylie Chair of Maritime Strategy at the US Naval War College, told US military publication [Stars and Stripes](#) on Monday that the Navy was “reverting to our World War II approach” by de-emphasizing its large fleet carriers and trying to create a more flexible force that wouldn’t be crippled by the loss of a few key warships.

“If we show our adversaries this approach works, we bolster our ability to deter them from assailing ourselves or our allies,” Holmes said.

However, the core of US naval power projection remains its 11 massive Nimitz-class and Ford-class [aircraft carriers](#), the largest warships afloat at roughly 100,000 each. In addition, nine smaller amphibious assault ships used by the Marine Corps, which can carry helicopters and F-35s in addition to Marine expeditionary units and their beachhead assault equipment, effectively function as another type of aircraft carrier.

About 36 ships and more than 50 virtual units, in addition to military, civilian and contract personnel, will participate in the exercise. Six naval and Marine Corps component commands, five U.S. fleets and three Marine Expeditionary Forces will be involved.

However, the drills themselves will only involve a small fraction of the total US fleet: just 36 ships, in addition to more than 50 virtual units. Still, those come from six US Navy and Marine Corps component commands, five US fleets and three Marine Expeditionary Forces, according to Stars and Stripes.

Last year, USMC planners began rethinking the force's composition amid changing strategic goals and moved to shift away from ground combat and toward a greater naval role. They have [drawn up plans](#) for ditching most of the Corps' artillery, tanks and several infantry battalions, while looking instead toward rocket artillery and light amphibious warships and docking vessels. That is, in turn, part of a greater shift in emphasis on building up the [Navy's missile arsenal](#) to match China's massive force of long-range anti-ship missiles, many of which have ranges so great they not only exceed US missile ranges, but [US radar ranges](#).

The drills come in the wake of other large drills in the regions where US warships will participate in the LSE, including the [Sea Breeze NATO](#) drills in the Black Sea and secretive war games between [Japan and the US](#) reportedly rehearsing a future war with China over Taiwan, which Beijing claims is a rebellious province of China and whose separatist ambitions they have accused Washington of encouraging.

The Pentagon has also been looking at further expanding its naval [operations in the Arctic](#), which will become both increasingly navigable and conflict-prone as climate change leads to melted polar ice caps and makes possible exploitation of fisheries and mineral resources in the region. The Navy has announced plans for "freedom of navigation" [types of operations](#) in the Arctic like those it stages in the South China Sea and Black Sea, among other places, to challenge what Washington considers the "excessive maritime claims" of nations like Russia, China and Vietnam.

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'This is Crucial': New York City to Require Proof of COVID Vaccination for Indoor Settings
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

Earlier, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio announced that any new municipal workers joining the administration will be required to be vaccinated against COVID-19 before reporting to work, underscoring that a failure to do so would prompt a delayed start date. It comes amid a renewed push for vaccination efforts within the densely-populated city.

Residents and visitors to New York City will soon be required to show proof that they were vaccinated against the deadly COVID-19 virus if they want to partake in any indoor activities, city officials revealed on Tuesday.

The announcement was made by Mayor Bill de Blasio during a [Tuesday briefing](#) in which he revealed the verification was needed for indoor settings ranging from restaurants, gyms and, of course, entertainment centers. Approved passes for proof of vaccination would include the CDC's vaccine card, the city's own card and the state's [digital pass](#).

The "Key to NYC Pass" initiative will take effect on August 16 and effectively mark the Big Apple as the first major American city to take on such an endeavor. However, businesses will have

until September 13 to begin enforcing the new rules, offering companies a grace period while the de Blasio administration launches its four-week public service campaign and finalizes regulations.

"It's time for people to see vaccination as literally necessary to living a good and full and healthy life," de Blasio said during the briefing. "This is crucial, because we know that this will encourage a lot more vaccination - we've seen it already."

"If you want to participate in society fully, you've got to get vaccinated," de Blasio added, underscoring that the "time is now" to clamp down on the ever-contagious Delta variant that is making up an overwhelming majority of hospitalized COVID-19 cases.

"This is going to make clear, you want to enjoy everything great in this summer of New York City? Go get vaccinated."

De Blasio also clarified that in order to either resume work in the outlined industries or parton the establishments, individuals would either have to be fully vaccinated or have at least one dose of an approved COVID-19.

Latest [government figures](#) for the New York City metro area indicate that at least 5 million New Yorkers have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine, a tally that amounts to about 60% of the city's population.

Over the last several months, de Blasio has been working alongside city officials to encourage locals to get the jab through a variety of incentives, some of which even include a \$100 stimulus. The cash incentive, which only kicked off a few days back, has so far attracted more than 11,000 New Yorkers to be vaccinated.

Although there has been support for de Blasio's announcement, not all have welcomed the move warmly. Both the [New York City Hospitality Alliance](#) and the [National Restaurant Association](#) have acknowledged that enforcement of the mandate could help to prevent a full shutdown of the industry, but that it will create difficulties for restaurant staff.

The latest development came shortly after de Blasio announced that all new hires for the city needed to be vaccinated or have at least received one vaccine dose as part of the growing efforts to curb the raging Delta COVID-19 variant.

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Cuomo-No - Cartoon

An investigation into sexual harassment allegations encompassing New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo (D) has concluded that the state leader made sexual advances on nearly a dozen women and had actively worked to retaliate against one of his accusers. The probe's conclusions have since reinvigorated past calls for Cuomo to resign.

New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo has refused to step down from his governorship, regardless of the sexual harassment findings that were announced and laid bare earlier in the day by investigators.

Responding to the findings, Cuomo issued a [statement](#) in which he stated that he “never touched anyone inappropriately or made inappropriate sexual advances,” explaining away the allegations by noting that it’s “just not who I am and that’s not who I’ve ever been.”

New York Attorney General Letitia James earlier revealed during a Tuesday briefing that independent investigators assigned to the probe uncovered “deeply disturbing” revelations that proved Cuomo had “sexually harassed current and former state employees in violation of federal and state laws.”

The [165-page report](#) backed many allegations that surfaced in late 2020 and into 2021, with one accuser detailing [earlier this year](#) that Cuomo had groomed her over a period of two years. Similarly to the events that unfolded previously, a chorus of congressional US lawmakers and state officials urged Cuomo to resign from his post, among them House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) and even [US President Joe Biden](#).

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Florida Governor Places Unilever on ‘Scrutinized’ List Amid Ben & Jerry’s Sales Halt Conflict by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

Over the last several weeks, the decision by American ice cream company Ben & Jerry’s to halt the sales of its sweets in the West Bank and East Jerusalem prompted outrage as US officials opted to implement their own responses against the US creamery. Now, Florida officials have weighed in and taken a page from the company’s own move.

Florida has placed Unilever, the parent company of Ben & Jerry’s, on a state watch list after the creamery recently decided to halt some of its operations in “occupied territories” along the Israeli state, it was revealed on Tuesday.

Gov. Ron DeSantis made the grand revelation via a [Tuesday statement](#) in which he detailed that Unilever was being tacked onto Florida’s “Scrutinized Companies that Boycott Israel” list after he initially submitted a [request](#) in late July, just moments after the creamery announced its shift in business practices.

The release from the governor’s office specifies that if Unilever does not back down on its sales halt within the next 90 days, it will effectively become subject to an investment prohibition and will see any contracts with the company or its subsidiaries cut.

“As a matter of law and principle, the state of Florida will not tolerate discrimination against the state of Israel or the Israeli people,” DeSantis said in a statement accompanying the release.

“By placing Ben & Jerry’s Fortune 500 parent company Unilever on our List of Scrutinized Companies that Boycott Israel, Florida is sending a message to corporate America that we will defend our strong relationship with the Jewish State.”

“I will not stand idly by as woke corporate ideologues seek to boycott and divest from our ally, Israel,” he added.

Jimmy Patronis, who serves as the chief financial officer for the Sunshine State, further underscored in the release that “Ben & Jerry’s decision to very publicly discriminate against Israel was a shortsighted attempt to virtue signal to folks on the radical left.”

The strongly-worded release from the governor's office also emphasized that steps taken with the Florida State Board of Administration were intentionally done to "deter any other woke corporation that might consider" cutting ties with Israel.

"There is nothing progressive about boycotting the only democracy in the Middle East," the release states after detailing a recent opinion piece authored by Ben Cohen and Jerry Greenfield, the ice cream company's founders.

The latest only comes days after the Permanent Israeli Ambassador to the UN, Gilead Erdan, issued [multiple letters](#) to US governors urging them to strike back at Ben & Jerry's through their state's legislation against the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement. Israeli officials also kicked things up after some 90 Knesset members [signed a letter](#) urging Ben & Jerry's to backtrack their decision.

To date, Unilever has stood firm and stressed that it wholly intends to remain "[fully committed](#)" to Israel, regardless of the creamery's late July announcement that it would no longer operate in areas it considered occupied by the Israeli state.

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Listen: Evidence Against Cuomo in New York Probe Includes Clip of Him Singing Motown Hit to Accuser
by [Gaby Arancibia](#)

Earlier, the New York Attorney General's Office released a 168-page report by independent investigators that detailed several instances in which New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo (D) allegedly made sexual advances against nearly a dozen former and current state employees. The report came several months after allegations first surfaced in late 2020.

Newly released evidence by the New York Attorney General's Office in the case against Gov. Andrew Cuomo includes an audio clip of the governor crooning a classic Motown love song to one of his female aides during a debriefing in late 2019.

The clip, which was released earlier Tuesday as part of evidence detailing sexual advances allegedly made by Cuomo, is an audio recording of a phone call between Cuomo and aide Charlotte Bennett, one of several women who have come forward with sexual harassment accusations against the governor.

In the recording, Bennett can be heard identifying herself to Cuomo, who then proceeds to respond with "Ok" before singing a rendition of hit Motown song "[Do You Love Me](#)" by The Contours.

With Bennett appearing to nervously laugh off the musical performance, Cuomo responds by questioning whether Bennett is familiar with the song. When she admits she is not familiar with the 1962-released tune, Cuomo acknowledges it's "before your time." Then just as Bennett remarks that she "appreciated" his rendition, he begins to once again sing the chorus of the song.

"It's like [from] the '50s," Cuomo suggests, before stating that the song "is before my time."

The slightly awkward phone conversation took place on October 4, 2019, and is just one encounter outlined in the 168-page report released on Tuesday by New York Attorney General Letitia James, who declared during an earlier conference on the findings that the independent investigation unearthed "deeply disturbing" revelations about Cuomo's behavior with staffers. The report itself concluded that Cuomo "engaged in conduct constituting sexual harassment under federal and New York State law." Other encounters described in the findings note that the governor engaged in "unwelcome and nonconsensual touching, as well as making numerous offensive comments of a suggestive and sexual nature that created a hostile work environment for women."

James' Tuesday reveal prompted a chorus of calls from congressional US lawmakers and [US President Joe Biden](#) urging Cuomo to resign from his post, while the governor has [rejected the findings](#) and insisted that he never engaged in the inappropriate behavior described in the report.

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NY Gov. Andrew Cuomo: 'I Never Touched Anyone Inappropriately'
by [Evan Craighead](#)

Earlier on Tuesday, attorneys Joon H. Kim and Anne L. Clark, independent investigators appointed by New York Attorney General Letitia James (D), concluded that New York Governor Andrew Cuomo (D) sexually harassed several women "by engaging in unwanted groping, kissing, and hugging."

Shortly after the [publication of the independent investigators' findings](#), the New York governor went live on Tuesday with a prerecorded briefing in which he claimed to have never touched anyone inappropriately.

"I want you to know directly from me that I never touched anyone inappropriately or made inappropriate sexual advances," Cuomo said. "I am 63 years old. I have lived my entire adult life in public view. That is just not who I am and that's not who I've ever been."

The independent probe, which interviewed Cuomo and 178 other individuals, determined that Cuomo's actions toward 11 women - many of whom happened to be government employees - violated multiple state and federal laws.

Cuomo maintained on Tuesday that he has done nothing wrong. The New York governor also revealed that his attorney "has done a response to each allegation and the facts are much different than what has been portrayed."

During the prerecorded briefing, Cuomo addressed allegations that he made offensive and/or sexual comments toward Charlotte Bennett, a former aide who said that the New York governor asked her if she was open to having sex with an older man.

Cuomo argued that Bennett and her lawyer "read into comments I made and draw inferences that I never meant. They ascribe motives I never had - and simply put - they heard things I just didn't say."

Meanwhile, Bennett called on the New York governor to resign, shortly after the findings were released.

Even fellow Democrats, such as Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) and Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), have renewed their calls for Cuomo's resignation.

"The New York State Attorney General has conducted an independent, thorough and professional investigation that found the Governor violated state and federal law, had a pattern of sexually harassing current and former employees, retaliated against at least one of the accusers and created a hostile work environment," [Schumer and Gillibrand wrote](#) in a Tuesday news release.

"No elected official is above the law," they noted. "The people of New York deserve better leadership in the governor's office. We continue to believe that the Governor should resign." House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) also weighed in on the Tuesday developments and urged Cuomo to step down from his post. "Recognizing his love of New York and the respect for the office he holds, I call upon the governor to resign," she wrote.

New York State Assembly Speaker Carl Heastief, a Democrat, said the findings in the independent investigators' report were "disturbing."

"The details provided by the victims are gut-wrenching. Our hearts go out to all the individuals who have had to endure this horrible experience," Speaker Heastief said in a statement. "The conduct by the Governor outlined in this report would indicate someone who is not fit for office." He added that the Assembly intends to conduct an "in-depth examination" of the AG report with Assembly counsels and a legal firm that has been retained. The Assembly Judiciary Committee has also been forwarded the report.

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US President Biden Calls on NY Gov. Cuomo to Resign Over Damning NY AG Probe Findings by [Evan Craighead](#)

Earlier on Tuesday, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo (D) proclaimed that he would not be resigning from his position because he "never touched anyone inappropriately or made inappropriate sexual advances." However, the independent investigators appointed by New York Attorney General Letitia James declared that Cuomo sexually harassed several women. US President Joe Biden declared on Tuesday that the New York governor "should resign" following the publication of a damning report that said Cuomo engaged in inappropriate and unwanted groping, hugging, kissing and comments that accusers have labeled "deeply humiliating, uncomfortable, offensive, or inappropriate."

"I think he should resign," Biden said matter-of-factly. "I understand that the state legislature may decide to impeach [Cuomo]. I don't know that for a fact. I haven't read all that data." However, Biden appeared to take up for Cuomo after he was told that the New York governor was using a picture of them embracing as an example of his common interactions with people. "I'm sure there [were] some embraces that were totally innocent, but apparently the [New York] Attorney General decided there were things that weren't," Biden declared.

Biden's call for Cuomo's resignation falls in line with comments he made to ABC back in March. At the time, the US president told ABC's George Stephanopoulos that he believed Cuomo should resign if the New York Attorney General probe confirmed the claims leveled by the women.

"I think he'll end up being prosecuted, too," Biden said.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) also called on the New York governor to resign on Tuesday, commending the "women who came forward to speak their truth" during the independent investigation.

At the state level, New York Assembly Speaker Carl Heastief, a Democrat, [declared that](#) "it is abundantly clear to me that the Governor has lost the confidence of the Assembly Democratic majority and that he can no longer remain in office."

"Once we receive all relevant documents and evidence from the Attorney General, we will move expeditiously and look to conclude our impeachment investigation as quickly as possible," he said.

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Watch: Irate Frontier Airlines Passenger Restrained With Duct Tape After Groping Flight Attendants
by [Evan Craighead](#)

Last week, the Association of Flight Attendants-CWA released a survey that polled around 5,000 flight attendants and found that more than 85% of them dealt with unruly passengers as air travel increased in 2021. Over 58% of respondents experienced more than five incidents in 2021, and 17% of respondents reported physical incidents.

Maxwell Berry, a 22-year-old resident of Norwalk, Ohio, was arrested at Florida's Miami International Airport last week after allegedly groping two female flight attendants, and assaulting a male flight attendant on a Frontier Airlines flight from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to Miami, Florida.

According to a police report filed by the Miami-Dade Police Department, Berry was on his third alcoholic drink order when he allegedly brushed his empty cup against the flight attendant's "back side inappropriately. He then went on to grope the breasts of two flight attendants, who then contacted a male flight attendant to intervene.

Soon after the flight attendant intervened, Berry punched the Frontier employee in the face "with a closed fist."

"A fight ensued," the report read, detailing that the male flight attendant and other passengers on the flight attempted to restrain the 22-year-old "and had to tape him down to the seat and tie him down with a seatbelt extender."

Parts of the altercation were captured on camera, and have since been reposted on social media. Berry can be overheard shouting that his parents are worth more than two million dollars.

He also claimed that his grandfather is worth more than a fellow passenger's "f**king life."

"During a flight from Philadelphia to Miami on July 31, a passenger made inappropriate physical contact with a flight attendant and subsequently physically assaulted another flight attendant. As a result, the passenger needed to be restrained until the flight landed in Miami and law enforcement arrived," Frontier Airlines said in a statement.

However, because proper restraint policies were not adhered to, the flight attendant involved in the duct tape situation has been suspended from their duties.

"The flight attendants will be, as required in such circumstances, relieved of flying pending completion of investigation of the events."

Per the [latest data from the Federal Aviation Administration \(FAA\)](#), the transportation agency has logged 3,715 unruly passenger reports and 2,729 mask-related incidents. A total of 628 investigations have been launched by the FAA, and 99 enforcement cases have been initiated. Association of Flight Attendants-CWA President Sara Nelson issued a statement on Tuesday denouncing the decision to suspend a crew member.

"Management should be supporting the crew at this time not suspending them," [Nelson said in a quoted statement](#). "We will be fighting this with every contractual and legal tool available, but we would hope there will be no need for that as management comes to their senses and supports the people on the frontline charged with keeping all passengers safe."

News of the July 31 altercation aboard a Frontier Airlines flight from Philadelphia to Miami comes alongside the publication of footage from another incident aboard an American Airlines flight from New Orleans, Louisiana, to Austin, Texas, on August 1.

Passengers aboard the flight can be overheard saying "stop" as one man wearing a mask is seen fighting with a maskless man.

Per local Austin outlet KXAN, the fight occurred "over a seat that couldn't unrecline."

American Airlines later confirmed that law enforcement was requested, but Austin Police said the matter was dropped because "neither party wanted to pursue the matter." Both individuals were ultimately released from police custody.

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US Private Sector Adds 330,000 Jobs in July, Less Than Half of June - ADP Report

WASHINGTON, Aug 3 (Sputnik) - The US private sector added 330,000 jobs in July, according to the ADP National Employment Report that came in at less than half of the previous month's number as the coronavirus pandemic continued to challenge labor market recovery.

"The labor market recovery continues to exhibit uneven progress, but progress nonetheless,"

ADP Chief Economist Nela Richardson said of the July jobs growth that compared with June's 692,000 job additions. "Bottlenecks in hiring continue to hold back stronger gains, particularly in light of new COVID-19 concerns tied to viral variants."

Economists polled by US media had forecast a growth of 683,000 job additions on the average for July.

The ADP data came before the July non-farm payrolls report due from the Labor Department on Friday that would include figures for both private and government sector employment.

Economists are expecting a payroll addition of 880,000 for July versus 850,000 for June.

ADP's Richardson said the leisure and hospitality sector led private-sector job gains for a fifth straight month, though their growth had softened.

"The slowdown in the recovery has also impacted companies of all sizes," she said, adding, however, that "these barriers should ebb in coming months, with stronger monthly gains ahead as a result".

More than a year into the COVID-19 crisis, restoring job growth remains one of the biggest challenges of US policymakers.

The United States lost more than 21 million jobs between March and April 2020, at the height of business lockdowns forced by the coronavirus. At least 7 million of those jobs have yet to return, officials say.

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RPT: ANALYSIS - National Vaccine Mandate Could Alienate Many Americans, Fuel Distrust of Government

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - If the Biden administration tried to enforce a nationwide vaccine mandate it could alienate many Americans and increase distrust of the government unless it is implemented effectively, experts told Sputnik.

On Tuesday, President Joe Biden during a press conference said the rise in COVID-19 cases due to the Delta variant is a "preventable tragedy," that will get worse before it gets better. He referred to the current crisis as a "pandemic of the unvaccinated."

With COVID-19 cases surging due to the Delta variant, Biden last week ordered all federal employees to get vaccinated or wear masks. In remarks last week, Biden said it was legal for businesses to require vaccinations, citing a Justice Department ruling, but said he was unsure if it was legal for the government to do the same. The White House, meanwhile, has said that a national vaccine mandate is not currently under consideration.

DISTRUST & HESITANCY

The daily COVID-19 case count spiked more than 500% during the past 30 days with a rising trend seen in 48 of the 50 US states. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has been warning that the Delta coronavirus variant appears to cause more severe illness. The CDC also issued new guidance recommending that all Americans - including those vaccinated - wear a mask indoors in locations where the infection rate is high.

"I am struggling to see the vaccination mandate... it could further alienate people with questions or those who already distrust the system," University of Minnesota Associate Professor of Health Policy and Racial Equality, Rachel Hardeman, told Sputnik when asked about a possible nationwide mandate. "It absolutely needs to be handled properly."

Hardeman said such alienation could exacerbate racial inequities given a large number of African Americans are hesitant to take the vaccine because they are already distrustful of the government.

She said frequent and honest conversations, building confidence using trusted and respected voices in various communities and other strategies are important ways to increase people's willingness to get vaccinated.

Dr. Michael LeNoir, who served as the 114th president of the National Medical Association, however, sees the distrust across several demographics and believes masks and vaccine mandates have to become law.

"We have a recalcitrant group of people," LeNoir, a California-based immunology specialist who has been a physician for more than 50 years, told Sputnik. "Where did all these scientists suddenly come from?"

For a variety of reasons, he added, young people think the vaccine will weaken them while athletes believe it will lower their performance. Meanwhile, right-wingers and supporters of former President Donald Trump oppose masks and vaccines for political reasons, the doctor said.

"Trumpites should realize that they'll die and the party will lose political power," Dr. LeNoir warned, while observing that right-wing media outlets have begun to change their tune. Overall he said people need to accept these new restrictions because the "noose will tighten." For example, he mentioned that the National Football League (NFL) announced that players who fail to get vaccinated will not get paid.

He also said there are several approaches for addressing the issue including underscoring the evidence and urging Americans to think of the moral obligation to their family and the community.

"It's an opportunity to take one for the team," Dr. LeNoir said.

As schools prepare to open across the United States, CDC officials are recommending that all teachers, staff and students of K-12 schools wear masks, even if they are vaccinated. As the delta variant explodes across the country, especially in places where vaccination rates are low, children are unprotected against the virus.

Washington, DC-based teacher Michelle Hunt-Bell said that people are frustrated and confused by the conflicting advice coming from the CDC and Biden administration.

"COVID may not ever go away but you can't keep locking things down. Some people won't wear masks and those who were vaccinated will ask, 'Why did I take the shots then?' There's going to be a lot of pushback," Hunt-Bell told Sputnik. "People are gonna say 'no.' Those who aren't vaccinated or who are vaccine-hesitant will resist."

RACIAL DISPARITIES

The experts said it is especially important for minority communities to overcome this distrust given they are disproportionately affected by the pandemic.

Dr. LeNoir said Blacks, Latinos and immigrants have borne the brunt of the pandemic largely because they have had to work in the worst environments.

"Black people have more chronic diseases, are affected more and are dying in greater numbers," Dr. LeNoir said. "African Americans are the ones who work at the grocery stores and out in public. They are the bus drivers, those people cleaning, working in nursing homes and in people's homes taking care of their children."

Hardeman said minorities must be able to access the vaccine even after they overcome this hesitancy.

"With politicization of the issue and the history of harm to African Americans and people of color, I'm not surprised we are where we are," Hardeman said. "People who are looking for the vaccine should be able to get it. Anecdotally, the needle is moving slowly."

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RPT - Rights Group Says Biden Must Stop Expulsion, Build Infrastructure for Asylum Seekers

EL PASO, August 3 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration must immediately start developing infrastructure to accommodate the arrival of asylum-seeking migrants at the US southern border instead of turning them away under a coronavirus-related public healthy policy, Hope Border Institute Deputy Director Marisa Garza told Sputnik.

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on Monday extended the Trump-era policy, known as Title 42, which authorizes immigration enforcement to immediately turn away undocumented migrants on the United States' borders as part of an effort to control the spread of the novel coronavirus.

"The Hope Border Institute retains its posture against the use of Title 42, the Trump-era policy that effectively shuts off access to asylum at our southern border," Garza said. "There are concrete ways that the Biden administration can develop the appropriate infrastructure to support a safe and orderly welcome while not trampling on the rights of men, women and children to seek asylum. The time is now to deploy them."

The United States is capable of safely accommodating access to migrants on the southern border and demonstrated it in the past with the orderly wind down of the Remain in Mexico policy, Garza said.

On Monday, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) renewed its legal battle against the federal government to block the Title 42 policy after the Biden administration conveyed no intention to terminate the rule any time soon.

The policy has been left in place to help deter the hundreds of thousands of migrants crossing into the United States illegally from Mexico over the last several months.

US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) data shows that Border Patrol agents encountered 188,829 undocumented migrants on the country's border with Mexico in June, bringing the total number of apprehensions in the region since October to more than 1.1 million. As of October, more than 751,844 migrants have been turned away at the US southern border under the Title 42 policy, according to CBP data.

Border Patrol officials have indicated that the month of July saw even larger groups coming across the border more frequently and continuing into early August.

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UPDATE 2 - Pentagon Confirms 1 Officer Killed in Shooting Incident - Statement

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - The Pentagon Force Protection Agency (PFPA) confirmed that one of their officers was killed during a shooting incident outside the Pentagon.

"PFPA mourns the tragic loss of a Pentagon Police officer killed during this morning's incident at the Pentagon," the agency said via Twitter on Tuesday. "Our thoughts and prayers are with the officer's family. Additional info on the officer will be forthcoming, following full next of kin notification."

Earlier on Tuesday, Pentagon Police Chief Woodrow Kusse said a Pentagon police officer was attacked on the metro bus platform outside the Defense Department building and gunfire was exchanged, resulting in several casualties. He said they are not looking for any additional suspects and there is no continuing threat, but the investigation is ongoing.

The Associated Press identified the deceased suspect as Austin William Lanz, 27, of the US state of Georgia. The report said Lanz ambushed a Pentagon police officer, stabbing him in the neck before other officers shot and killed him.

The report noted, according to sources, Lanz enlisted in the US Marine Corps in 2012 but was "administratively separated" less than a month later. However, Lanz's motive remains unclear. US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin in a statement said the investigation is looking into the circumstances of the incident, adding that the probe must proceed unimpeded and without speculation.

Austin extended his condolence to the family of the slain officer, who he said died as a result of injuries he sustained in the morning attack at the Pentagon. Austin also ordered flags to be flown half-mast at the Pentagon.

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With COVID-19 cases surging due to the Delta variant, Biden last week ordered all federal employees to get vaccinated or wear masks. In remarks last week, Biden said it was legal for businesses to require vaccinations, citing a Justice Department ruling, but said he was unsure if it was legal for the government to do the same. The White House, meanwhile, has said that a national vaccine mandate is not currently under consideration.

DISTRUST & HESITANCY

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"I am struggling to see the vaccination mandate... it could further alienate people with questions or those who already distrust the system," University of Minnesota Associate Professor of Health Policy and Racial Equality, Rachel Hardeman, told Sputnik when asked about a possible nationwide mandate. "It absolutely needs to be handled properly."

Hardeman said such alienation could exacerbate racial inequities given a large number of African Americans are hesitant to take the vaccine because they are already distrustful of the government.

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For a variety of reasons, he added, young people think the vaccine will weaken them while athletes believe it will lower their performance. Meanwhile, right-wingers and supporters of former President Donald Trump oppose masks and vaccines for political reasons, the doctor said.

"Trumpites should realize that they'll die and the party will lose political power," Dr. LeNoir warned, while observing that right-wing media outlets have begun to change their tune. Overall he said people need to accept these new restrictions because the "noose will tighten." For example, he mentioned that the National Football League (NFL) announced that players who fail to get vaccinated will not get paid.

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As schools prepare to open across the United States, CDC officials are recommending that all teachers, staff and students of K-12 schools wear masks, even if they are vaccinated. As the delta variant explodes across the country, especially in places where vaccination rates are low, children are unprotected against the virus.

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"COVID may not ever go away but you can't keep locking things down. Some people won't wear masks and those who were vaccinated will ask, 'Why did I take the shots then?' There's going to be a lot of pushback," Hunt-Bell told Sputnik. "People are gonna say 'no.' Those who aren't vaccinated or who are vaccine-hesitant will resist."

RACIAL DISPARITIES

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Elon Musk Praises 'Amazing' Russian Rocket Engine Designs

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - SpaceX's Elon Musk said there are some amazing rocket engine designs made by the Russians who have been doing stage combustion for a long time. "There's some amazing Russian rocket engine designs," Musk told the blogger Everyday Astronaut in an interview posted on Tuesday. "They've been doing stage combustion for a long time."

SpaceX's Raptor engine uses higher pressure on its full-flow stage combustion, which is a relatively minor increment relative to what the Russians have already done before, Musk said. The Starship is a fully reusable two-stage-to-orbit super heavy-lift launch vehicle under development by SpaceX.

In May, Musk said there should be more dialogue between the United States and Russia. He also said he admires many of the technological achievements of Russia and the USSR.

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US Judge Temporarily Blocks Abbott's Order Restricting Transportation of Migrants in Texas

EL PASO, August 3 (Sputnik) - A US federal judge has issued an order temporarily blocking Texas Governor Greg Abbott's order that restricts the transportation of migrants in the state as part of an initiative to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, a court filing revealed.

"This Executive Order causes irreparable injury to the United States and to individuals the United States is charged with protecting, jeopardizing the health and safety of non-citizens in

federal custody, risking the safety of federal law enforcement personnel and their families, and exacerbating the spread of COVID-19," US District Judge Kathleen Cardone said on Tuesday. Moreover, Cardone said the US administration is likely to prevail in the case based on its claims that Abbott's order interferes with federal immigration law and operations.

Cardone said Abbott's order will be blocked until August 13, which is the date set for the first hearing in this case.

Last week, Abbott issued an order prohibiting civilians, such as contractors, from transporting illegal migrants as part of an effort to prevent migrants from spreading the novel coronavirus. US Attorney General Merrick Garland told Abbott the Justice Department would take legal action if the order was not rescinded, but the Texas governor rejected the warning.

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Secret Donors Pouring Millions of Dollars into 2022 US Midterm Election - Watchdog

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - Secret donors are already contributing millions of dollars into the 2022 US midterm election, a campaign finance watchdog group said in a press release. The watchdog OpenSecrets said on Tuesday, citing new campaign finance filings, that secret donors are already contributing millions of dollars to Political Action Committees (PACs) for the 2022 midterm elections.

All 435 seats in the US House of Representatives and 34 of the 100 seats in the Senate will be up for election on November 8, 2022.

The release said the Democrats' Senate Majority PAC has received \$4.3 million in dark money and the House Republicans' Congressional Leadership Fund has received some \$3.5 million. Most of the funding has gone towards ad campaigns either attack or defending President Joe Biden's legislative goals, the release said.

The watchdog group expects secret donors to contribute millions of more dollars into PACs until the November vote in 2022.

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US, Israeli Officials Discuss Concerns Over Gulf of Oman Tanker Attack - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman discussed a shared concern about the recent attack on the oil tanker MV Mercer Street during a meeting with Israeli National Security Adviser Eyal Hulata and Senior Foreign Policy Adviser Shimrit Meir, State Department Spokesperson Ned Price said in a statement.

"They also discussed concerns regarding the attack on the Mercer Street vessel. Deputy Secretary Sherman emphasized the strong partnership between the United States and Israel, US support for the normalization agreements between Israel and countries in the Arab and

Muslim world, as well as the US government's unwavering support for Israel's security," Price said on Tuesday.

MV Mercer Street, a Japanese-owned vessel with alleged links to an Israeli billionaire, was attacked off the coast of Oman in the Arabian Sea last Thursday. The attack resulted in the deaths of two crew members, one from Romania and the other from the UK.

Several countries including the US and UK have attributed responsibility for the attack to Iran, although Tehran denies any involvement. Both the EU and NATO have both condemned the attack, and the UN has called upon countries to avoid taking any actions that may escalate the situation.

In addition to discussing the Mercer Street attack, Sherman and the Israeli officials talked about the strategic challenges posed by Iran, advancing Palestinian freedom and security, and the US-Israel bilateral relationship more generally.

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Pentagon Confirms 1 Officer Killed in Shooting Incident - Statement

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Earlier on Tuesday, Pentagon Police Chief Woodrow Kusse said a Pentagon police officer was attacked on the metro bus platform outside the Defense Department building and gunfire was exchanged, resulting in several casualties. He said they are not looking for any additional suspects and there is no continuing threat, but the investigation is ongoing.

US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin in a statement said the investigation is looking into the circumstances of the incident, adding that the probe must proceed unimpeded and without speculation.

Austin extended his condolence to the family of the slain officer, who he said died as a result of injuries he sustained in the morning attack at the Pentagon. Austin also ordered flags to be flown half-mast at the Pentagon.

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New York Governor Should Resign Following Results of Sexual Harassment Probe - Biden

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - New York Governor Andrew Cuomo should resign after an investigation by the state's Attorney General concluded that he sexually harassed several women with whom he worked, US President Joe Biden said.

"I think [Cuomo] should resign," Biden said on Tuesday afternoon, joining New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio and New York Senators Chuck Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand in their calls for the governor to resign.

A months-long investigation into allegations against Cuomo - sanctioned by New York State Attorney General Letitia James - concluded that he harassed multiple women, including younger colleagues. The investigation also revealed that he and a senior aide attempted to retaliate against the victims.

Biden pointed out that the investigation has found some of the embraces he had with the women were inappropriate, but acknowledged he had only seen the results of the investigation and not the details.

Cuomo denies the allegations of wrongdoing and inappropriate conduct, claiming that the investigation weaponized his "everyday interactions."

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US Approves \$270M In Sale to Greece of Sustainment Services for F-16 Jets - Defense Agency

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - The US State Department has given its approval to a proposed \$270 million sale of equipment and maintenance services needed to sustain Greece's fleet of F-16 fighter jets, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) said.

"The government of Greece has requested to buy US government and contractor engineering, technical, and logistics support services for F-16 Aircraft Structural Integrity Program (ASIP), F-16 Aircrew Training Device (ATD), Low Altitude Targeting and Infrared for Night (LANTIRN)

and Reconnaissance (RECCE) Pods support programs," the DSCA said in a press release on Tuesday. "The total estimated value is \$270 million."

The ability to provide this level of support to the F-16 program will increase Greece's inter-operability with NATO forces and enhance its ability to provide for security of its borders, the release said.

Greece has demonstrated a continued commitment to modernizing its military and will have no difficulty absorbing this additional sustainment support into its armed forces, the release added.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) -

AFGHANISTAN DEVELOPMENTS

* US Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke over the telephone with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and underscored the need to accelerate peace talks and achieve a political solution, State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Tuesday.

* The United States is concerned that the violence perpetrated by the Taliban movement (banned in Russia) will result in a civil war in Afghanistan, Price said.

* The United States condemns the recent bombing in the Afghan capital of Kabul and vows to stand by its Afghan partners, Price said.

* The Taliban demands the "lion's share" of power in the future government of Afghanistan after the withdrawal of US troops from the country, US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad said.

* It is too soon to say that there is trust between the United States and the Taliban as the two sides have fought for the last 20 years, Khalilzad said.

* The United States plans to meet with his extended "Troika" - Russia, China and Pakistan - in the coming days to discuss the situation in Afghanistan, Khalilzad said.

US-RUSSIA RELATIONS

- * The US authorities are acting outside the legal field regarding the issue with visa requests for Russian diplomats in the United States, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said on Tuesday.
- * The three-year limitation of visas for Russian diplomats in the United States does not apply to employees of diplomatic missions of other countries, Zakharova said.

PENTAGON INCIDENT

- * The defense Department was placed on lockdown after gunshots not far from the nearby Metro station, US media reported on Tuesday.
- * Three people were wounded in the shooting outside the Defense Department and include one fatality, the Arlington County Fire Department said.
- * The Defense Department has lifted the lockdown it imposed at its headquarters building after a shooting incident earlier and has reopened the facility, the Force Protection Agency said.

NASA DELAYS STARLINER LAUNCH

- * A delay of Boeing's Starliner launch was caused by a technical problem with a new launch is expected to take place on Wednesday, NASA spokeswoman Patricia Bielling told Sputnik.

NEW YORK GOVERNOR CASE

- * New York State Attorney General Letitia James on Tuesday announced that the investigation into allegations Governor Andrew Cuomo harassed multiple women concluded he broke state and federal laws.
- * James said investigators investigated the complaints by 11 women and interviewed 179 people and reviewed 74,000 pieces of evidence that included documents, emails, texts, audio files and pictures.
- * Cuomo denied allegations he harassed the women, saying the investigation had "weaponized everyday interactions" and "unfairly characterized" him.
- * US President Joe Biden called on Cuomo to resign given the findings in the investigation.

COVID-19

- * The surge in coronavirus Delta variant cases across the United States in the past several weeks could have been prevented but the weeks ahead will be marked by a worsening of the situation before an improvement is achieved, US President Joe Biden said on Tuesday.
- * New York City will require residents to receive at least one of the injections against the novel coronavirus for them to use indoor restaurants, gyms and other indoor facilities, Mayor Bill de Blasio said.

US-GEORGIA MILITARY COOPERATION

- * The US State Department has signed off on a proposed sale of shoulder-fired Javelin missiles to the Republic of Georgia, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) said on Tuesday.
- * The Georgian government has requested to buy 82 Javelin FGM-148 missiles as well as 46 Javelin Command Launch Units (CLU) at an estimated cost of \$30 million, the DSCA said.

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Biden Says COVID-19 Cases Surge 'Preventable Tragedy,' Will Get Worse Before Improving

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) – The surge in Delta variant cases of the coronavirus across the United States in the past weeks could have been prevented but the weeks ahead will be marked by a worsening of the situation before an improvement may be seen, the US President Joe Biden said on Tuesday.

"Experts tell us that we are going to see these [Delta] cases rise in the weeks ahead, a largely preventable tragedy that will get worse before it gets better," Biden said while delivering remarks on the state of the pandemic in the US.

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US Lawmakers Urge IMF to Limit Belarus' Access to Special Drawing Rights Funds - Letter

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - US lawmakers have called on the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to limit Belarus' access to the Special Drawing Rights (SDR) funds, a letter to acting US Executive at the IMF, Elizabeth Shortino, and published by Congressman Bill Keating revealed on Tuesday.

"We implore you to use America's voice, voting power and influence to defend our democratic principles abroad," the letter said. "Specifically, we urge you to work with IMF member states to restrict or condition the use of these funds to proactively prevent the Lukashenko regime from accessing the hard currency they desperately desire until they have agreed to a dialogue with the Coordination Council and organize free and fair elections."

The lawmakers - William Keating, Marcy Kaptur, Christopher Smith and Joe Wilson - also called on the IMF to give assurances that it will continue to boost its transparency requirements concerning SDR allocations.

The lawmakers explained that The Friends of Belarus Caucus was created to support the freedom and democracy movement in Belarus, as well as to call for new, free and fair elections, and stand against the government of Lukashenko.

They pointed out that they regret finding out the IMF Board of Governors had reached a decision to allocate SDR funds to Minsk.

"The Lukashenko regime has oppressed and brutalized its own people and must be held accountable for these reprehensible actions. For these reasons, we strongly oppose the allocation of almost \$1 billion of SDR funds, as they undermine the substantial efforts made by the democratic movement in Belarus to fight back against the regime's repression," the letter said.

After incumbent Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko secured his sixth term in office in the election on August 9, 2020, the country witnessed protests by the opposition contesting the

official results of the vote and claiming electoral fraud. Opposition figures also accused the security forces of resorting to excessive violence during the protests. The Belarusian authorities have repeatedly said protests in the country are being coordinated from abroad.

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Pelosi Calls on New York Governor Cuomo to Resign After Sexual Harassment Allegations

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi on Tuesday called on New York Governor Andrew Cuomo to resign over allegations he sexually harassed several members of his staff.

"Recognizing his love of New York and the respect for the office he holds, I call upon the Governor to resign," Pelosi said in a statement.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, both representing New York, also put out a statement calling on Cuomo to resign, adding that the people of New York deserve better leadership and no elected official is above the law.

Earlier on Tuesday, New York State Attorney General Letitia James said a months-long probe sanctioned by her office concluded that Cuomo harassed multiple women, many of them his younger colleagues, breaking state as well as US federal laws. She said Cuomo and some of his senior aides also attempted to silence complainants by making it difficult for them to continue their work for the state.

Cuomo's investigators, who took up complaints by 11 women, say they interviewed 179 people and reviewed 74,000 pieces of evidence that included documents, emails, texts, audio files and pictures.

Cuomo, in an immediate reaction, denied he had harassed any of the complainants, saying the probe had "weaponized everyday interactions" of his and "unfairly characterized" him.

The probe against Cuomo was a civil investigation and it is not known whether any criminal charges will eventually be pressed against the governor.

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US Approves Sale of Tank-Busting Javelin Missiles to Georgia - Defense Security Agency

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - The US State Department has signed off on a proposed sale of shoulder-fired Javelin missiles to the Republic of Georgia, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) said on Tuesday.

"The Government of Georgia has requested to buy eighty-two (82) Javelin FGM-148 Missiles; and forty-six (46) Javelin Command Launch Units (CLU)," DSCA said in a press release. "The estimated total cost is \$30 million."

The proposed sale will improve Georgia's capability to meet current and future threats by increasing its anti-armor capacity, the release said.

In the past, the US has also sold Javelins to Ukraine and Poland.

Javelin is a guided munition that can be carried and launched by a single person, day or night in any weather. The fire-and-forget technology allows the gunner to fire and immediately take cover, move to another fighting position or reload, the US Army explains in one website.

Video demonstrations available on YouTube show the weapon autonomously targeting weak points in armored vehicles, such as the top of a tank.

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Chinese National Pleads Guilty in Scheme to Launder Drug Money - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) – A Chinese national and naturalized US citizen admitted leading an international network that laundered at least \$30 million in drug profits, the Justice Department said on Tuesday.

"Xizhi Li, 48, played a leadership role within a years-long conspiracy to use a foreign casino, foreign and domestic front companies, foreign and domestic bank accounts, false passports and other false identification documents to launder money on behalf of transnational drug-trafficking organizations, whose main drug-trafficking activities involved cocaine," Justice said in a press release.

In a separate trial, Li's co-defendant Tao Liu was sentenced to seven years in prison following an earlier guilty plea as part of the same drug-trafficking, money-laundering conspiracy and bribery charges, the release said.

At times, Liu accepted bulk drug cash from Xizhi Li, to be laundered, the release added.

Li faces a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison and a \$10 million forfeiture judgment when he is sentenced on October 26, according to the release.

At least four other defendants have either pleaded guilty or been sentenced in connection with the scheme, Justice said.

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US Will Closely Monitor Ukraine's Probe Into Shishov's Cause of Death - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - The United States will continue to closely monitor Ukraine's investigation into the cause of death of Belarus activist Vitaly Shishov who was found hanged in a park in Kiev after he was reported missing, US Department of State Spokesperson Ned Price said in a press briefing on Tuesday.

"We are deeply saddened by the reports of the tragic death of Mr. Vitaly Shishov. We will continue to closely monitor the Ukrainian authorities' investigation into the cause of his death," Price said.

"We condemn in the strongest terms the ongoing violent crackdown on Belarusian civil society and transnational repression by the Lukashenko regime," he added.

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Biden to Address Cuomo Investigation Later on Tuesday - White House

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden will give later on Tuesday his reaction to the report on the sexual harassment allegations against New York Governor Andrew Cuomo, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki said.

"The president will give his own reaction to the announcement this morning and give his own view later this afternoon," Psaki said on Tuesday.

Earlier in the day, New York Attorney General Letitia James said a report from the investigation into allegations of Cuomo sexually harassing multiple women found he violated federal and state law. Cuomo is also alleged to have attempted to retaliate or silence his victims.

The investigation began in March, after New York State's executive chamber granted James' request to initiate a probe.

New York Senators Chuck Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand as well as New York city Mayor Bill de Blasio have called on Cuomo to resign.

Cuomo denies the allegations, saying that the investigation is weaponizing "everyday interactions" and he never touched anybody inappropriately or made inappropriate sexual advances.

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Several Casualties Confirmed in Pentagon Shooting, FBI Leading Probe - Police

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - There are several casualties following a shooting that occurred outside the Pentagon in which an officer was attacked by the suspect on the bus platform in front of the building, Pentagon Force Protection Agency Chief Woodrow Kusse said on Tuesday.

"A Pentagon police officer was attacked on the metro bus platform," Kusse told reporters.

"Gunfire was exchanged and there were several casualties. The FBI is on scene leading the investigation."

Kusse said the investigation into the shooting is ongoing and could not confirm reports that the suspect and a Pentagon police officer died, but he said there were several injuries. Kusse

added that authorities are not currently searching for another suspect and there is no continuing threat.

The suspect's motive is not known at this time, Kusse said.

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US Approves Sale of Tank-Busting Javelin Missiles to Georgia - Defense Security Agency

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - The US State Department has signed off on a proposed sale of shoulder-fired Javelin missiles to the Republic of Georgia, the Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA) said on Tuesday.

"The Government of Georgia has requested to buy eighty-two (82) Javelin FGM-148 Missiles; and forty-six (46) Javelin Command Launch Units (CLU)," DSCA said in a press release. "The estimated total cost is \$30 million."

The proposed sale will improve Georgia's capability to meet current and future threats by increasing its anti-armor capacity, the release said.

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Biden Administration in Touch With Pentagon After Shooting Incident - White House

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) – The Biden administration is in close touch with Pentagon officials over the shooting incident outside the Defense Department building that left one police officer and a suspect dead earlier in the day, the White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki said on Tuesday.

"We are in close touch with Pentagon officials, my colleague, John Kirby will be a briefing at the Pentagon and sharing more details on their end and we don't have additional details to share publicly as the next of kin is still being notified," Psaki said at a press briefing when asked to provide more details on the shooting incident outside Pentagon.

Earlier on Tuesday, a police officer died after being attacked by an unknown man outside the Pentagon building. The suspect was reportedly shot by the police and died at the scene.

Pentagon Force Protection Agency Chief Woodrow Kusse said that several injuries resulted from the incident as the Federal Bureau of Investigation is leading the probe into the shooting.

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US Concerned Afghanistan Violence Will Result in Civil War - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - The United States is concerned that the violence perpetrated by the Taliban opposition movement (banned in Russia) will result in a civil war in Afghanistan, US Department of State Spokesperson Ned Price said in a press briefing on Tuesday.

"They [the Taliban] have said that they see the utility of a negotiated solution, they are engaged in Doha," Price said. "If they seek to contravene what they have said, then there will be an international riot, they won't have the support of their people, they won't have the support of the international community, and the concern on the part of all of us... is that the results will be civil war."

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US Condemns Bombing in Afghan Capital, Vows to Stand by Afghan Partners - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - The United States condemns the recent bombing in the Afghan capital of Kabul and vows to stand by its Afghan partners, US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Tuesday at a daily briefing.

Earlier in the day, an eyewitness and a source in the Kabul police told Sputnik that a car exploded near a lawmaker's house, after which several armed people entered the house.

"We've seen the reports that have emerged today... We unequivocally condemn the bombing and we will continue to stand by our partners, our Afghan partner, " Price said told reporters.

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FBI Leading Probe into Pentagon Shooting - Police

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - The FBI is leading the investigation into the shooting that occurred outside the Pentagon in which an officer was reportedly stabbed by the suspect, Pentagon Force Protection Agency Chief Woodrow Kusse said on Tuesday.

Kusse told reporters the investigation into the shooting is ongoing and could not confirm reports that the suspect and a Pentagon police officer died in the incident, but he said there were several injuries. Kusse added that authorities are not currently searching for a suspect and there is no continuing threat.

The suspect's motive is not known at this time, Kusse said.

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S.Arabia Not to Have Lapses in Security Services Work Like in Khashoggi's Murder- Minister

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - Saudi Arabia will not have any lapses in the work of security services like the one that happened with the murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi, Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud said on Tuesday at the Aspen Security Forum.

"I am confident in saying that something like this cannot happen again in the kingdom or in any of its agencies," Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud said.

He called Khashoggi's murder a "heinous" crime.

"We have taken the actions, we have brought those people who have been implicated in the murder to court, they have faced trial, they have been sentenced," the minister said adding that the kingdom will ensure that "there can not be any lapses in authority or lapses in judgment" of the security services.

Khashoggi went missing in 2018 after entering the Saudi consulate in Istanbul. Riyadh initially denied any knowledge of the journalist's whereabouts but eventually admitted that he had been killed inside the diplomatic mission's building. The Saudi government sentenced several people over their role in Khashoggi's murder and has repeatedly denied allegations that members of the royal family were involved in the incident.

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New York Mayor Leads Call For Cuomo Ouster After Probe Says Governor Acted Inappropriately

NEW YORK, Aug 3 (Sputnik) - Nearly all of New York's congressional delegation has broken ranks with Governor Andrew Cuomo after a state investigation concluded on Tuesday that he sexually harassed multiple women, with New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio leading calls for the resignation of the governor.

"It is beyond clear that Andrew Cuomo is not fit to hold office and can no longer serve as Governor," said de Blasio who has not ruled out running for the governor's job when his own current term as mayor ends. "He must resign, and if he continues to resist and attack the investigators who did their jobs, he should be impeached immediately."

Earlier on Tuesday, New York State Attorney General Letitia James said a months-long probe sanctioned by her office concluded that Cuomo harassed multiple women, many of them his younger colleagues, breaking state as well as US federal laws. She said Cuomo and some of his senior aides also attempted to silence complainants by making it difficult for them to continue their work for the state.

Cuomo also lost the support of a majority of lawmakers in his Democrat party in the state legislature, including New York's two US senators Chuck Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand.

"Due to the multiple, credible sexual harassment and misconduct allegations, it is clear that Governor Cuomo has lost the confidence of his governing partners and the people of New York," the Democratic senators wrote in a joint statement. "Governor Cuomo should resign."

Cuomo's investigators, who took up complaints by 11 women, say they interviewed 179 people and reviewed 74,000 pieces of evidence that included documents, emails, texts, audio files and pictures.

Cuomo, in an immediate reaction, denied he had harassed any of the complainants, saying the probe had "weaponized everyday interactions" of his and "unfairly characterized" him.

"I never touched anyone inappropriately or made inappropriate sexual advances," the governor said in a live stream carried on Twitter.

De Blasio, one of the most vociferous voices against Cuomo, defended the probe and Cuomo's accusers.

"My first thoughts are with the women who were subject to this abhorrent behavior, and their bravery in stepping forward to share their stories," the New York mayor said in a statement. "The Attorney General's detailed and thorough report substantiates many disturbing instances of severe misconduct. Andrew Cuomo committed sexual assault and sexual harassment, and intimidated a whistleblower. It is disqualifying."

The probe against Cuomo was a civil investigation and it is not known whether any criminal charges will eventually be pressed against the governor.

At the age of 63, Cuomo has been in office for three consecutive terms since 2011.

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US Concerned by Incident in Gulf Of Oman, Coordinating With Partners - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - The United States is concerned about the recent incident in the Gulf of Oman and is now coordinating with partners, US State Department spokesperson Ned Price said on Tuesday at a daily briefing.

Earlier in the day, the United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) reported a "non-piracy incident" with an unnamed vessel in the Gulf of Oman. It was about the red-level notification (attack, hijacking, incident, abduction) east of Fujairah (UAE). The UKMTO upgraded the incident to "Potential Hijack."

"We are aware of the reports of the maritime incident in the Gulf of Oman. We have concerns. We are looking into it, we are coordinating with partners," Price said when asked about the incident and the US reaction to it.

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US Parents Back Student Mask Mandate, Less Supportive of Vaccine Requirements – Poll

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) – A majority of US parents of schoolgoing children this fall want all teachers and students to wear facemasks if they remain unvaccinated against COVID-19, while less than half favor a vaccine mandate for their children to return to classrooms, according to a Gallup poll released on Tuesday.

"Two-thirds of U.S. adults and 60% of K-12 parents support mask mandates for unvaccinated teachers and staff members. A slightly lower percentage of U.S. adults (64%) and 57% of parents of school-aged children favor mask mandates for unvaccinated students," a press release explaining the poll said.

Regarding COVID-19 vaccine requirements, a full 60% of Americans, but less than half of K-12 parents, currently think high school (47%) or middle school students (43%) should have to be vaccinated to attend school, the release said.

COVID-19 vaccine approval is currently limited to children age 12 and above, which coincides with the year when many, if not most, US children, begin middle school.

The survey did not include questions about face-mask mandates for vaccinated students and teachers, with the release noting that the July 19-26 poll coincided with the emergence of new recommendations that teachers and students wear facemasks regardless of vaccination status, the release said.

In addition to universal masking recommendations for all teachers and students, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), continue to advise that all eligible Americans get a COVID-19 vaccine, the release added.

The poll was conducted from a web survey with participants in a 100,000 member panel that was randomly chosen to be representative of the entire US population, according to the release.

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Suspect in Violence Outside Pentagon Shot by Police, Died at Scene - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - The gunman allegedly responsible for the shooting outside of the Pentagon building was shot and killed by police officers, the Associated Press reported on Monday.

The agency said one police officer died after being stabbed.

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Saudi Arabia to Back Iran Nuclear Deal if Tehran Never Gets Nuclear Weapons - Minister

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - Saudi Arabia will support a nuclear deal with Iran as long as the agreement ensures Tehran will never acquire nuclear weapons, Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud said on Tuesday.

"We certainly support a deal with Iran as long as the deal ensures that Iran will not now or ever gain any access to nuclear technology," he said during an Aspen Security Forum event.

Iran and Saudi Arabia cut diplomatic ties in 2016, with the latter repeatedly calling for harsher conditions for Iran in the 2015 nuclear agreement. The countries have recently launched several rounds of talks to discuss bilateral relations and ways to resolve regional issues.

In 2015, Iran sealed a deal on nuclear development with Russia, China, the United States, the United Kingdom, the European Union, France and Germany, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Under the terms of the agreement, Tehran had to

scale back its nuclear program and considerably decrease its uranium reserves in exchange for sanctions relief.

However, the agreement was all but mothballed in 2018 when former US President Donald Trump withdrew Washington from the deal and reimposed a sanctions policy against Tehran, which responded by gradually abandoning its commitments under the agreement.

Since April, Vienna has been hosting sessions of the JCPOA joint commission, as well as informal meetings in different formats aimed at preventing the Iran nuclear deal from falling apart after the United States withdrew from the agreement. The sixth round of the talks finished on June 20. Tehran said that the negotiations should resume after President-Elect Ebrahim Raisi takes office on August 5.

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Rights Group Says Biden Must Stop Expulsion, Build Infrastructure for Asylum Seekers

EL PASO, August 3 (Sputnik) - The Biden administration must immediately start developing infrastructure to accommodate the arrival of asylum-seeking migrants at the US southern border instead of turning them away under a coronavirus-related public healthy policy, Hope Border Institute Deputy Director Marisa Garza told Sputnik on Tuesday.

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on Monday extended the Trump-era policy, known as Title 42, which authorizes immigration enforcement to immediately turn away undocumented migrants on the United States' borders as part of an effort to control the spread of the novel coronavirus.

"The Hope Border Institute retains its posture against the use of Title 42, the Trump-era policy that effectively shuts off access to asylum at our southern border," Garza said. "There are concrete ways that the Biden administration can develop the appropriate infrastructure to support a safe and orderly welcome while not trampling on the rights of men, women and children to seek asylum. The time is now to deploy them."

The United States is capable of safely accommodating access to migrants on the southern border and demonstrated it in the past with the orderly wind down of the Remain in Mexico policy, Garza said.

On Monday, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) renewed its legal battle against the federal government to block the Title 42 policy after the Biden administration conveyed no intention to terminate the rule any time soon.

The policy has been left in place to help deter the hundreds of thousands of migrants crossing into the United States illegally from Mexico over the last several months.

US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) data shows that Border Patrol agents encountered 188,829 undocumented migrants on the country's border with Mexico in June, bringing the total number of apprehensions in the region since October to more than 1.1 million. As of October, more than 751,844 migrants have been turned away at the US southern border

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US Congress Should Have More Authority to Tame "Wild West" of Crypto - SEC Chief

WASHINGTON, Aug 3 (Sputnik) - The US Congress should have more authority to police cryptocurrency trading, lending and platforms which were akin to the "Wild West" of the alternative currency world in the damage they could do to investors, Securities and Exchange Commission Chairman Gary Gensler said Tuesday.

"Right now, we just don't have enough investor protection in crypto," Gensler said at the Aspen Security Forum. "Frankly, at this time, it's more like the Wild West. We need additional Congressional authorities to prevent transactions, products and platforms from falling between regulatory cracks."

The SEC chief said the crypto market involves many tokens that may be unregistered securities, leaving their prices open to manipulation and millions of investors vulnerable to various inherent risks.

Gensler also called on lawmakers to give his agency more power in policing crypto lending and platforms like peer-to-peer decentralized finance sites that allowed lenders and borrowers to transact in cryptocurrencies by bypassing traditional banks.

"This asset class is rife with fraud, scams and abuse in certain applications," Gensler said. "If we don't address these issues, I worry a lot of people will be hurt."

Gensler's comments came as central banks around the world, including the US Federal Reserve, are exploring the idea of having their own cryptocurrencies. But while central bank authorities agree that the monetary system of the future might largely be dictated by digital currencies, many are also wary of illegitimate activities from these and have been studying ways to counter them.

Bitcoin, the of digital coins, has been super volatile this year, rallying more than 800 percent at one point from a year ago before losing about half its value. Bitcoin is completely banned by India and heavily restricted by China's government. US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen has also called Bitcoin an "inefficient" payment system that was too volatile for the average user or investor and often misused for illicit finance.

Bitcoin, the progenitor of digital coins, has shown exceeding volatility this year, rallying more than 800 percent at one point from a year ago before losing almost half its value. Bitcoin is completely banned by India and heavily restricted by China's government. US Treasury

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Police Officer Dies After Shooting Outside Pentagon - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - A police officer was killed in the shooting outside the Pentagon building, CNN reported on Tuesday.

Media reports said earlier that three people were injured in the shooting and that the suspect was on the run.

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Global Airlines Suffer Worst Year on Record During 2020 COVID-19 Crisis - Trade Group

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - Domestic and international airlines suffered the worst year on record in 2020, as the coronavirus pandemic slashed passenger traffic by more than 60 percent and global carriers lost more than \$125 billion, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) said in a report on Tuesday.

"At the depth of the crisis in April 2020, 66 percent of the world's commercial air transport fleet was grounded as governments closed borders or imposed strict quarantines. A million jobs disappeared," IATA Director General Willie Walsh said in a press release explaining the report. About 1.8 billion passengers flew in 2020, a decrease of 60.2 percent compared to the 4.5 billion who flew in 2019. Connectivity between airports fell by a similar percentage, as airlines canceled routes and reported net losses of \$126.4 billion, the report said.

The decline in air passengers in 2020 was the largest recorded since data tracking airline passengers was first compiled in 1950, the report added.

Air freight provided some relief for the beleaguered industry, with industry-wide cargo traffic having recently returned close to pre-pandemic levels following a 9.7 percent year-on-year drop in 2020, according to the report.

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UNSC Strongly Condemns Attack on UN Compound in Afghanistan's Herat - Statement

UNITED NATIONS, August 3 (Sputnik) - The UN Security Council on Tuesday issued a statement strongly condemning the attack on the United Nations compound in Herat, Afghanistan, and called on the government and the Taliban opposition movement (banned in Russia) to engage meaningfully in the peace process.

"The members of the Security Council condemned in the strongest terms the deplorable attack against the United Nations compound in Herat, Afghanistan, on 30 July 2021, which resulted in the death of an Afghan security forces guard and several injured," the statement said. "The members of the Security Council called on both the Islamic Republic and the Taliban to engage meaningfully in an inclusive, Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process in order to make urgent progress towards a political settlement and a ceasefire."

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UN Chief Welcomes IMF Approval of \$650Bln SDR Allocation - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, August 3 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres welcomed the allocation by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) of \$650 billion of Special Drawing Rights to help countries cope with the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis, the UN Office of the Spokesperson said in a statement on Tuesday.

"The Secretary-General welcomes the decision by the International Monetary Fund to approve a \$650 billion allocation of its Special Drawing Rights to boost liquidity," the statement said. "This comes at a time when fiscal constraints have been worsened by the COVID-19 crisis."

Guterres said in the statement that it would be important for wealthy countries to consider channeling these resources to vulnerable nations in need of liquidity injection, the statement added.

Establish the Resilience and Sustainability Trust at the IMF to support recovery is critical to providing more support for vaccinations and debt management, according to the statement.

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New York Governor Cuomo Says Never Touched Anyone Inappropriately

NEW YORK, Aug 3 (Sputnik) - New York Governor Andrew Cuomo denied allegations leveled by nearly a dozen women that he had harassed them sexually, saying that a probe by state-appointed investigators had "weaponized everyday interactions" and "unfairly characterized" him.

"I never touched anyone inappropriately or made inappropriate sexual advances," Cuomo said in a live stream carried on Twitter.

Earlier on Tuesday, New York State Attorney General Letitia James said Cuomo was found to have harassed multiple women, breaking state as well as US federal laws, in a months-long probe sanctioned by her office. Investigators who took up complaints by 11 women say they interviewed 179 people and reviewed 74,000 pieces of evidence that included documents, emails, texts, audio files and pictures.

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UN Has No Specific Data on Mercer Street Attack, Urges Avoiding Any Escalation - Spokesman

UNITED NATIONS, August 3 (Sputnik) - The United Nations has no specific information on who is responsible for the attack on the commercial oil tanker MV Mercer Street off the coast of Oman, but calls for avoiding any escalation that could deteriorate the situation, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said in a press briefing on Tuesday.

"We do not have any specific information on who could have attacked the vessel. What is clear is that any attack is... something that we condemn. It is vitally important to ensure freedom of navigation anywhere around the world but especially in that area, which is so critical to world commerce," Dujarric said. "We would also, of course, call on everyone to avoid any escalation that could make matters worse."

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UPDATE 2 - Pentagon Lifts Lockdown After Shooting Incident Reportedly Leaves 1 Dead

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - The Pentagon Protection Force Agency said on Tuesday the lockdown at the Pentagon building has been lifted after a deadly shooting.

Three people were shot, including one fatality, The Citizen Stringer news outlet said citing a radio transmission from the Arlington County Fire Department.

The scene outside the Pentagon appears under control, with swarms of police, emergency and medical services present, a Sputnik correspondent reported.

The FOX 5 local television station reported that a law enforcement officer was among the three people injured in the shooting, but it was not clear if they suffered gunshot wounds. The report said the gunman has not been captured by law enforcement officers.

In a separate statement, the fire department confirmed they had multiple patients at the scene of the incident.

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US Coast Guard Plans Offensive Cyber Attacks to Protect Maritime Assets From Hackers

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - The US government plans to deploy cyber weapons in attacks on hackers who threaten the United States' maritime infrastructure, the Coast Guard said in the 2021 Cyber Strategic Outlook report released on Tuesday.

"In coordination with interagency partners and foreign allies, we will conduct offensive cyber operations to deny or degrade our adversaries' ability to plan, fund, communicate, or execute operations of their own," the report said.

Much of the effort will focus on the US marine transportation system (MTS), which is a "prime target for malicious cyber actors who seek to disrupt our supply chain," the report added.

The MTS consists of more than 25,000 miles of coastal and inland waterways serving 361 US ports, where the ease of moving people and goods generates capital, grows the economy and

protects the nation, with a lower environmental impact than other modes of transportation, according to the report.

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UN 'Glad to See' Belarus Activist Shishov's Death Being Investigated - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, August 3 (Sputnik) - The United Nations is glad to see that the death of Belarusian activist Vitaly Shishov, who was found hanged in a park in the Ukrainian capital of Kiev after he was reported as missing, is being instigated, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said in a press briefing on Tuesday.

"We're obviously glad to see that this is being investigated. I think his death needs to be investigated fully to elaborate all of these circumstances, and we, of course, send our condolences to his family and friends," Dujarric said.

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UN Has No Data on Blast in Kabul But 'Concerned' About Overall Situation - Spokesperson
UNITED NATIONS, August 3 (Sputnik) - United Nations spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said on Tuesday he has not yet seen the reports of an explosion in Kabul nearby the house of the Afghan Defense Minister, but added that the world body is extremely concerned about the situation in different parts of the country.

"I had not seen those reports. I don't want to comment on that I have no details on," Dujarric said when asked whether the United Nations had information on the incident. "We, of course, are extremely concerned by the fighting that we're seeing different parts of Afghanistan."

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Pentagon Lifts Lockdown After Shooting Incident Reportedly Leaves 1 Dead

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - The Pentagon Protection Force Agency said on Tuesday the lockdown at the Pentagon building has been lifted after a deadly shooting.

The Citizen Stringer news outlet reported, citing a radio transmission from the Arlington County Fire Department, that three people were shot, including one fatality.

The FOX 5 local television station reported that a law enforcement officer was among the three people injured in the shooting, but it was not clear if they suffered gunshot wounds. The report said the gunman has not been captured by law enforcement officers.

In a separate statement, the fire department confirmed they had multiple patients at the scene of the incident.

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Trudeau's Liberals Hold 7-Point Canada-Wide Lead on Eve of Expected Election - Poll

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - Canada's governing Liberal Party led by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau holds a seven-point point lead over its nearest oponent just days before an election call is expected, a new Leger poll revealed on Tuesday.

The Liberal Party currently enjoys as 36 to 29 percent lead over the Conservative Party of Canada (CPC) among decided voters, with the left-wing New Democrats (NDP) rounding out the top-three at 20 percent support.

Trudeau leads the list of preferred prime ministerial options, with 27 percent saying he would make the best head of government and 48 percent believe will win the next federal election. However, there are warning signs for the Liberals, as more Canadians say they are dissatisfied than satisfied with Trudeau's leadership by a 49 to 46 percent margin.

The poll comes days before Trudeau, reportedly, will ask the Governor General of Canada, Mary Simon, to dissolve parliament citing non-confidence in the incumbent government from opposition parties and order an election.

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Pentagon Lifts Lockdown Implemented After Shooting Incident - Force Protection Agency

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - The Defense Department has lifted the lockdown it imposed at its headquarters building after a shooting incident earlier and has reopened the facility, the Force Protection Agency said on Tuesday.

"The Pentagon has lifted the lock down and has reopened. Corridor 2 and the Metro entrance remains closed. Corridor 3 is open for pedestrian traffic," the agency said via Twitter.

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One Person Dead in Pentagon Shooting - Reports

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - Three people were wounded in the shooting outside the Pentagon, including one fatality, the Citizen Stringer news outlet said on Tuesday citing a radio transmission from the Arlington County Fire Department.

The Pentagon Force Protection Agency told Politico that a single gunman had been shot by Pentagon police officers.

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Factory Employee Shoots, Injures Three Workers in Tennessee, Gets Killed by Police

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) – Three people were non-fatally wounded in Antioch, Tennessee after an employee of Smile Direct Club opened fire at a workplace and was shot dead by responding police, Metro Nashville Police Department spokesman Don Aaron said on Tuesday.

"It is our understanding that he has worked here [at Smart Direct Club warehouse] for a relatively short period of time," Aaron said at a press briefing. "The man was shot by Metro [Nashville] Police. He went down in the intersection. Officers rendered aid to him. He was transported to a medical facility, where he is now deceased."

The incident took place at about 5:58 a.m. local time (10:58 GMT) at the intersection of Antioch Pike and Franklin Limestone Road, Aaron said.

The shooter was a 22-year-old employee who had worked at Smile Direct Club since June but also was employed there between late 2019 and early 2020, Metro Nashville Police said in a tweet.

The US is experiencing a dramatic surge in gun violence. Deaths from shootings in major US cities are up 18 percent year-over-year and that's after 2020 brought the largest single-year increase ever recorded.

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Bipartisan US Legislation Unifies Probe of Mystery Weapon Used to Attack Americans in Cuba

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - A senior White House official would oversee multiple probes of the so called "Havana syndrome" - neurological damage suffered by US officials in Cuba and elsewhere from an mysterious source believed to be a sophisticated directed energy weapon - under bipartisan legislation introduced in Congress on Tuesday.

"US public servants injured by directed energy attacks should be treated with the same urgency as any other American injured in the line of duty," US Senator Jeanne Shaheen said in a statement, as reported by Politico. "They shouldn't have to jump through bureaucratic hoops to access the care they need, which compounds the suffering they've already endured."

A group of senators, including Shaheen, unveiled the legislation to focus multiple US investigations of mysterious brain injuries affecting dozens of American officials and personnel around the world, especially in Cuba.

The legislation authored by Shaheen, a Democrat, and Republican Senator Susan Collins would create a new position on the White House's National Security Council to oversee the federal government's response to the suspected attacks. In addition, the legislation would require all US agencies and departments involved in the investigation to appoint a senior-level official to handle the Havana Syndrome cases.

More than 100 US officials have experienced multiple symptoms ranging from ringing in the ears to a loss of cognitive abilities and possibly permanent brain damage, according to US officials.

The attacks were first reported by the US Embassy in Havana in 2016, when diplomats and other officials began experiencing unusual and unexplained symptoms.

Similar attacks on US personnel have since been reported in other nations, as well as in Miami, the Washington DC suburbs and even on White House grounds, according to media reports.

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Blinken, Ghani Stress Need to Hasten Peace Talks, Reach Political Settlement - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of State Antony Blinken in a call with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani underscored the need to accelerate peace talks and achieve a political solution to the turmoil set in motion by the withdrawal of US and allied troops from the war-torn country, State Department Spokesperson Ned Price said on Tuesday.

"The Secretary and President Ghani emphasized the need to accelerate peace negotiations and achieve a political settlement that is inclusive, respects the rights of all Afghans, including women and minorities, allows the Afghan people to have a say in choosing their leaders, and prevents Afghan soil from being used to threaten the United States and its allies and partners," Price said in a readout of the call.

The pair also condemned the ongoing violence and human rights abuses throughout the country as the Taliban terror group (banned in Russia), emboldened by the withdrawal of foreign troops, continues to advance in its bid to reclaim control of Afghanistan.

The troop pullout was one of the points of the agreement that the radical group and the United States reached in Doha in February 2020. Last month, US Central Command (CENTCOM) said troop withdrawal from Afghanistan is more than 95 percent complete.

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Scene of Pentagon Shooting Incident Secure, Still an Active Crime Scene - Security Force

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - The Pentagon Force Protection Agency said on Tuesday that the scene of the Pentagon shooting incident is secure but the area is still an active crime scene.

"The scene of the incident is secure. It is still an active crime scene. We request that everyone stay away from the Metro rail entrance and bus platform area. Transportation at the Pentagon is diverted to Pentagon City," the agency said via Twitter.

The Arlington County Fire Department said earlier firefighters encountered multiple patients at the scene.

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Pentagon Scene Still Active, Emergency Workers Encounter Patients - Rescue Service

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - The shooting scene at the Department of Defense is still active, with emergency workers encountering multiple patients, the Arlington Fire and Rescue service said on Tuesday.

"#Update - Scene is still active, ACFD [Arlington County Fire Department] did encounter multiple patients. NFI [non-food item] on patient status will be provided," the service said via Twitter.

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Washington Metro Line Suspended Amid Active Shooting Outside Pentagon - Correspondent

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - The operation of the blue line of the Washington, DC metro has been suspended on Tuesday afternoon over the police activity as announced by the train driver amid the reports of the fired shots at the Pentagon metro station, a Sputnik correspondent reports from the scene.

The train was stopped and people offloaded at the Arlington Cemetery station, one stop before the Pentagon metro station. The train will now turn around and head in the opposite direction.

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2002 Iraq War Authorization 'No Longer Necessary' to Protect Americans - Sherman

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - The 2002 Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF) against Iraq is no longer needed to protect Americans from terrorism and to maintain a strong relationship with Iraq, Deputy US Secretary of State Wendy Sherman said in a congressional testimony on Tuesday.

"The fact is, the 2002 AUMF is no longer necessary to protect the American people from terrorist threats, respond to attacks on our personnel or facilities overseas, to ensure the safety and security of our people, or to maintain our strong relationships with Iraq and other regional partners," Sherman told the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

The Foreign Relations Committee is holding the hearing concerning the Biden administration's perspectives on the future of the 2002 AUMF for Iraq, which was initially passed by Congress to authorize military force against the then government of Saddam Hussein.

On Monday, Baghdad and Washington issued a joint statement announcing that US combat forces will be leaving Iraq by December 31 - a decision which also came amid the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan.

Sherman said that the ongoing initiatives and activities by the departments of State and Defense would not be affected should Congress repeals the 2002 AUMF.

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Too Soon for US to Say We Trust Taliban Will Do What they Say - Khalilzad

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) – It is too premature to say that there is trust between the United States and the Taliban (banned in Russia) as American troops have been fighting with the group for the last 20 years, US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad said on Tuesday.

"We are talking about international politics, and especially with a group [Taliban] that we have been fighting for 20 years. It is not a question of trust," Khalilzad said at the Aspen Security Forum. "It is too soon to say that we trust them that they will do what they say. We hold them accountable for what they have agreed but we also are taking measures to make sure that we can protect our interests."

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Pentagon On Lockdown After Gunshots Fired Near Metro - Associated Press

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - Pentagon is currently under lockdown following gunshots heard not far from the nearby Metro station, the Associated Press reported Tuesday, citing sources.

At least one person was injured, the sources said.

Meanwhile, Pentagon said that the facility was "on lock down due to an incident at the Pentagon Transit Center."

"We are asking the public to please avoid the area. More information will be forthcoming," it tweeted.

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Khalilzad to Meet With Counterparts From Russia, China, Pakistan in Coming Days

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) – US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad said on Tuesday he plans to meet with his extended "Troika" colleagues from Russia, China and Pakistan in the coming days to discuss the situation in Afghanistan.

"We have a troika plus entity that we have established a couple of years ago that was Russia and China and ourselves and Pakistan, that we have issued similar statements and I will be meeting with them in a few days," Khalilzad said at an event with the Aspen Security Forum.

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NASA, Boeing Delay Starliner Launch Due to Technical Issue, Plan New Launch on Wednesday

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - A delay of Boeing's Starliner launch was caused by a technical problem with a new launch is expected to take place the next day, NASA spokeswoman Patricia Bielling told Sputnik on Tuesday.

"NASA, Boeing and United Launch Alliance (ULA) have scrubbed the Aug. 3 launch attempt of the agency's Orbital Flight Test-2 to the International Space Station due to unexpected valve position indications in the Starliner propulsion system. ULA will begin removing propellant from the Atlas V rocket," Bielling said. "Pending resolution of the forward work, our next available launch opportunity would be 12:57 p.m. EDT on Wednesday, Aug. 4."

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US Can Continue Missions in Iraq, Syria Even if Congress Repeals 2002 AUMF - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - The US government could continue conducting military operations in Iraq and Syria even if Congress decides to repeal the 2002 Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF), State Department legal adviser Richard Visek said on Tuesday.

"In sum, at the present time, we believe we have sufficient authority to continue the vital counter-ISIS mission in Iraq and Syria and to address any threats to US personnel or the United States that might arise in Iraq, without relying on the 2002 AUMF," Visek said during a hearing of the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

The 2002 AUMF initially authorized the use of military force against the government of then Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein.

US Defense Department General Counsel Caroline Krass also confirmed that there are no ongoing military operations that rely solely on the 2002 AUMF.

Last week, the Biden administration announced its intention to withdraw all US forces from Iraq by the end of 2021. The administration said the mission is set to switch focus toward helping and training Iraqi forces to combat the Islamic State terror group (banned in Russia).

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Cuomo Harassed Multiple Women, Breaking State, Federal Laws - New York Attorney General

NEW YORK, Aug 3 (Sputnik) - New York Governor Andrew Cuomo is found to have harassed multiple women, breaking state as well as US federal laws, state Attorney General Letitia James said on Tuesday.

"Specifically, the investigation found that Governor Andrew Cuomo sexually harassed current and former New York state employees by engaging in unwelcome and non-consensual touching and making numerous offensive comments of a suggestive, and sexual nature that created a hostile work environment for women," James said.

The Attorney General also said investigators interviewed 179 people and reviewed 74,000 pieces of evidence in the Cuomo case that included documents, emails, texts, audio files and pictures.

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Taliban Demands 'Lion's Share' of Power in Afghanistan - US Special Envoy

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - The Taliban movement (banned in Russia) is demanding the "lion's share" of power in the future government of Afghanistan after the withdrawal of US troops from the country, US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad said on Tuesday.

"At this point they [Taliban] are demanding that they take the lion's share of power in the next government given the military situation as they see it. And they are discussing these things. A lot of it is not in the public domain," Khalilzad said during an Aspen Security Forum event.

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Blinken, Ghani Stress Need to Hasten Peace Talks, Reach Political Settlement - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) – US Secretary of State Antony Blinken in a call with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani underscored the need to accelerate peace talks and achieve a political solution to the turmoil set in motion by the withdrawal of US and allied troops from the war-torn country, State Department Spokesperson Ned Price said on Tuesday.

"The Secretary and President Ghani emphasized the need to accelerate peace negotiations and achieve a political settlement that is inclusive, respects the rights of all Afghans, including women and minorities, allows the Afghan people to have a say in choosing their leaders, and

prevents Afghan soil from being used to threaten the United States and its allies and partners," Price said in a readout of the call.

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UN Rights Chief Urges Lebanon to Ensure Transparent Probe Into Beirut Blast - Spokesperson UNITED NATIONS, August 3 (Sputnik) - UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet called on Lebanon to ensure a transparent and effective investigation into the massive explosion that devastated Beirut and hold accountable those responsible for the explosion, spokesperson for the High Commissioner, Marta Hurtado, said in a statement on Tuesday. On August 4, 2020, more than 200 people lost their lives, and 6,500 were wounded, when some 2,750 tonnes of ammonium nitrate improperly stored at the Beirut port exploded, destroying some 73,000 apartments and causing \$15 billion in property damage.

"As despair deepens and anger mounts in Lebanon, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet is today stressing the urgent need for the Lebanese government to ensure a transparent, effective, thorough and impartial investigation into what happened last August and to hold those responsible accountable," Hurtado said.

Hurtado pointed out that despite the initial positive spirit when the government initiated judicial proceedings, the investigation appears to have stalled 12 months later and is coupled with a lack of transparency and accountability.

"The High Commissioner is also calling on the authorities to uphold the right of victims to effective remedy and reparations," Hurtado said.

In the aftermath of the explosion, the Lebanese government formed an investigation committee. The probe was led by Lebanese judge Fadi Sawan, who was dismissed after charging criminal negligence to several high-ranking politicians, including caretaker Prime Minister Hassan Diab. Lebanese President Michel Aoun also rejected calls from many world leaders for an international investigation into the cause of the explosion.

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Boeing Scraps Planned Launch of Starliner – Statement

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) – US aerospace giant Boeing has scrapped its second unmanned cargo test mission to the International Space Station (ISS), the company said on Tuesday.

"We're confirming today's #Starliner Orbital Flight Test-2 launch is scrubbed," Boeing said in a statement via Twitter, saying additional details are forthcoming.

Boeing's Starliner spacecraft, designed for manned flight, was due to launch on Tuesday from Space Launch Complex-41 at Cape Canaveral Space Force Station in Florida following a weather-related delay last week.

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UPDATE: Addition of Nauka Lab to ISS Does Well for Cooperation With Russia - NASA Chief
WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - The addition of the new Nauka multipurpose laboratory module to the International Space Station (ISS) is beneficial for successful cooperation with Russia, NASA Administrator Bill Nelson said on Tuesday.

"It does well for our continued collaboration with the Russians, and so I'm excited for what the future brings, Nauka, and the European robotic arm, are going to help lead even more discoveries, both for life here on Earth and as we move out further into the cosmos and onto Mars," Nelson said.

Nelson also praised the continued collaboration with the Russian partners.

"Thankfully, our relationship with the Russians, and I might point out, which started in the midst of the Cold War with the Soviet Union in 1975 that relationship with the Russians, has continued," Nelson said. "And it's been one of collaboration and partnership and our ISS operations team was able to work with them."

Nelson also said on Tuesday that he expects the US Congress will extend the life of the International Space Station to 2030.

"I believe we'll see the Congress this year, extend the life of the station to 2030," Nelson said.

In late July, the Nauka module successfully docked to the ISS, after 14 years of waiting on the Earth and eight days of orbital flight. This is the first Russian module sent to the station in 11 years. The module was originally scheduled to go into orbit in 2007, but the launch was postponed multiple times for various reasons.

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New York City to Require Vaccinations for Dining, Gyms, Other Indoor Activities - Mayor

NEW YORK CITY, Aug 3 (Sputnik) - New York City will require people to be vaccinated at least once against the COVID-19 to be able to use its indoor restaurants, gyms and other indoor facilities, Mayor Bill de Blasio said on Wednesday.

"The key to the NYC pass will be a first-in-the-nation approach," de Blasio told a media briefing.

"It will require vaccinations for workers and customers in indoor dining and indoor, fitness facilities, indoor entertainment facilities. This is going to be a requirement. The only way to patronize these establishments indoors will be if you're vaccinated (with at) least one dose."

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Biden Calls Two Officers Who Died by Suicide After Capitol Riot 'American Heroes'

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - US President Joe Biden took to Twitter to commemorate two police officers who responded to the Capitol riots in January and recently took their own lives.

"When the United States Capitol and our very democracy were under attack on January 6th, Officers Hashida and DeFreytag courageously risked their lives to defend them. They were American heroes. Jill and I are keeping their loved ones in our prayers during this difficult time," Biden tweeted.

On Thursday, the DC Metropolitan Police Department reported that two officers who responded to the US Capitol riot on January 6 committed suicide. Police Officer Gunther Hashida was found dead at his home on Thursday. Hours after the announcement of Hashida's death, the authorities confirmed officer Kyle DeFreytag died by suicide in July. All in all, four police officers are known to have died by suicide after being sent to protect the Capitol.

On January 6, a group of supporters of former President Donald Trump violently intruded the US Capitol in a bid to protest the lawmakers certifying the 2020 election results from several states Trump said were fraudulent. One protester was shot dead during the incident and federal law enforcement authorities have charged more than 500 people for their participation in the unrest.

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Addition of Nauka Lab to ISS Does Well for Cooperation With Russia - NASA Chief

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"It does well for our continued collaboration with the Russians, and so I'm excited for what the future brings, Nauka, and the European robotic arm, are going to help lead even more discoveries, both for life here on Earth and as we move out further into the cosmos and onto Mars," Nelson said.

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NASA Counts on Congress to Extend Life of Space Station to 2030 - Administrator

WASHINGTON, August 3 (Sputnik) - NASA Administrator Bill Nelson said on Tuesday that he expects the US Congress will extend the life of the International Space Station to 2030.

"I believe we'll see the Congress this year, extend the life of the station to 2030," Nelson said.

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